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SUBJECT: SMER'S THINK-TANK ROOTED IN THE PAST

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¶1. (U) Summary. A new think-tank established to advise the leftist political party Smer on matters concerning economy, politics and defense recently rolled out its foreign policy recommendations. The think-tank is dominated by older academics trained in the command-economy era who have decidedly anti-American views. It is still unclear how much influence this group would have on foreign policy in a Smer-led government; but the Embassy will strive to engage the leaders and explain U.S. foreign policy goals. End Summary.

¶2. (U) ASA (Analyses, Strategies, Alternatives) is a newly created think-tank associated with the front-running opposition party Smer. ASA was founded as a leftist alternative to existing think-tanks, including the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO) and MESA 10, which are viewed as having a centre-right bias. Post was invited to send a representative to sit in on a strategy session focusing on foreign policy issues that Smer will face if and when it forms a new government after the June 17 elections.

¶3. (SBU) Participants included several former members of the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL): Pavol Hamzik, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs under Meciar, now managing the Ph Inter Cons company; Juraj Zervan, Smer's shadow Foreign Minister and a career Foreign Service Officer; and leftist academics and researchers from the Institute of Political Science and the Slovak Academy of Sciences. (Comment. SDL was a successor of the pre-1989 Communist party that merged with Smer after failing to gain enough votes to enter Parliament in the 2002 elections. Pol FSN reported that after she was introduced as a representative of the U.S. Embassy she saw surprised expressions on several faces. End comment.) The session was organized and coordinated by the head of ASA, MP Vladimir Faic, and his assistant Juraj Horvath.

¶4. (SBU) The first speaker was Professor Krejci who spoke about about the importance of foreign policy and the need to control the MFA in any Smer-led government. Krejci spoke about the hegemony of the U.S. and the importance of providing a balance to this one-sided leadership of the world. He was critical of President Bush's policies, including the war in Iraq, and of America's "insensitive policies" in other parts of the world. Krejci expressed hope that Bush would be replaced by a Democratic candidate with a more moderate policy who would be "more acceptable" for leftists in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. He said Slovakia should focus more on EU relations and on working with countries in the Balkans, Russia and "natural allies." Krejci suggested the withdrawal of Slovak troops could be a good election topic for SMER, but others argued that citizens do not pay attention to foreign policy and that this issue

should not be dealt with in the campaign. (Comment: Neither Post nor local media expect that Iraq will become an issue in the campaign--reftel. End Comment.) Krejci noted that the Czech Republic is very outspoken on issues like Belarus and Cuba, but suggested it is only a political tool and that Slovakia does not necessarily have to copy such policies. While Krejci was speaking, Faic apologetically told Pol FSN that Krejci is a free academic and it is his right to be critical of the U.S.

15. (U) Krejci argued that SMER should not give up the MFA to another coalition partner and has to be prepared to place its own people in the MFA leadership. Krejci appealed to ASA to work hard in the coming weeks and prepare immediately a detailed analysis of future foreign policy goals in Slovakia after elections, because Fico needs to know what the priorities of SMER should be after elections.

16. (U) Both Zervan and Hamzik seemed to aspire to high positions in a Smer-led MFA. They both said that Slovak diplomacy has been too passive under current Minister Eduard Kukan, whom they accused of merely reacting to situations and statements. They said the same is true of diplomatic missions abroad where Deputies or First Secretaries are too often managing embassies and giving orders to politically-appointed ambassadors enjoying a good life. All the attendees concurred that this must change when Smer takes over MFA. (Note: Other SMER members have told us Fico, if Prime Minister, would cede the MFA to another party if it would help form the kind of coalition he wanted. End note.)

17. (SBU) Hamzik and Zervan were tasked with drafting a strategic paper on the future of Slovak diplomacy and Slovak foreign policy. The participants stressed that this material must be internal and only for Fico's eyes. It should not be presented at an upcoming ASA June 6 seminar during public sessions. (Comment. Pol FSN reported that several speakers

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indicated her presence when emphasizing the importance of keeping this strategy paper internal. ASA has invited us to the June 6 event. End comment.) On the other hand, ASA director Faic several times challenged Pol FSN to speak, whispering that it was a great opportunity to influence the strategies of ASA and Smer. When Pol FSN decided to leave Faic asked participants to be quiet and insisted that Pol FSN speak. Pol FSN offered the use of DVC equipment and American speakers who can help ASA with foreign policy issues and other questions of interest.

18. (SBU) Comment: ASA appears to have resurrected former Communist and Meciar-era experts and academics to advise Fico on future policies. Nonetheless, it is unclear how much influence the group would actually have on policies of a Smer-led government. Other foreign policy experts within the party, such as former-diplomat and now MEP Milos Koterec, have a more realistic attitude about the role of EU countries in the world and a more positive opinion of the U.S. Nonetheless, we will engage ASA members on foreign policy issues, as it is clear the leaders (if not the experts) would appreciate hearing a diversity of views. End comment.
VALLEE